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ABSTRACT

This study examined what elementary physical education teachers knew about classroom management, how that knowledge was gained, and how teacher knowledge changed over time. A total of 20 white, male and female physical educators completed individual interviews that examined their personal knowledge base about classroom management. Data analysis indicated that learning to manage one's own classroom was a developmental process influenced by personal and contextual forces. What teachers valued most was the knowledge that came from personal practice. They believed strongly in their wisdom of practice and the wisdom of other colleagues' practice. They did not, however, give much credence to wisdom from their teacher education programs. Respondents valued the role of their college field-based experiences and suggested adding more practicum opportunities into the undergraduate program. They used multiple classroom management strategies. On average, respondents had taught for 15 years, yet they consistently spoke of their willingness to change and seek out information to improve their classroom management skills. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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Teachers' Perspectives on Classroom Management in Elementary Physical Education

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002.

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Abstract

Classroom management is a critical component of effective teaching. Despite its importance, little information is available about how teachers gain and use knowledge about management in physical education. It was the purpose of this study to examine elementary physical education teachers' development and use of pedagogical knowledge related to class management. Twenty elementary teachers, 14 females and six males, were interviewed. A constant comparison process guided data analysis. Trustworthiness measures included triangulation of multiple data sources, member checks, and a search for negative cases. Results reveal insights into teachers' knowledge origins and influences, evolution, and content regarding class management.

What makes an effective teacher? Early attempts to answer this question focused on teacher characteristics and processes (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997). A more recent and promising approach to answering this question focuses more on what teachers know and how this knowledge leads to the decisions they make in their classes. As Schempp (1993) suggests, understanding teaching requires an understanding of teachers' knowledge bases.

A number of frameworks have been proposed for categorizing teacher knowledge (e.g., Carter & Doyle, 1987; Clandinin, 1986; Shulman, 1987). Although each system is unique, nearly all include some version of the following knowledge domains: (a) pedagogical knowledge, (b) subject matter knowledge, and (c) pedagogical content knowledge. General pedagogical knowledge is not subject matter specific and includes "generic" teaching knowledge (e.g., management, instructional strategies) about effective teaching that might be applicable in a wide variety of educational settings. Subject matter knowledge is a teacher's knowledge of and about the content to be taught. Pedagogical content knowledge is an integration of general pedagogical and specific subject matter knowledge. Although Marks (1990) suggests a precise distinction between types of knowledge is somewhat arbitrary, the distinctions have and continue to serve as a useful research heuristic.

Within physical education, much of the research has focused on pedagogical content knowledge. Amade-Escot (2000) provides a comprehensive review of the current state of pedagogical content knowledge in physical education. She suggests there are three research themes. The first theme focuses on teachers' knowledge and decisions, particularly based on expert-novice comparisons (e.g., Housner, Gomez, & Griffey, 1993; Rink, French, Lee, Solmon, & Lynn, 1994). A second area of pedagogical content knowledge within the field examines how teachers develop and change their knowledge (e.g., Rovegno, 1992; Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997). The role of the university in relation to pedagogical content knowledge forms the third focus area within physical education (e.g., O'Sullivan, 1996; Rovegno, 1995).

In contrast, pedagogical knowledge has not been a common focus of current research within or outside of physical education. This absence of research on general pedagogical knowledge is problematic because this knowledge area includes key components of effective teaching such as management. As Borko & Putnam (1996) noted, "General pedagogical knowledge of classroom management has sometimes received short shrift." (p. 675). This short shrift of such a vital topic is problematic as classroom management is a critical concern of all teachers and a key to effective teaching.

Another shortcoming of the research field related to teacher knowledge has been what Clandinin (2000) has called the distinction between "knowledge of teaching" and "teacher knowledge". A majority of the research on teacher knowledge, including that within physical education, falls within the "knowledge of teaching" framework in that knowledge is viewed as a possession, which can be identified, transferred, accumulated, and measured via standard assessments. Clandinin suggests that a more promising approach is to explore teacher knowledge which she describes as knowledge that "...comes from experience, is learned in context, and is expressed in practice....it is a form of knowledge embedded in teachers' lives, acquired through living, and expressed in context." (p. 29).

This investigation was an attempt to address these two shortcomings as we explored teachers' perspectives on their own pedagogical knowledge of management. This study is part of a larger project focusing on class management (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2001; Kulinna, Cothran, Regualos, 2001). The specific research questions that guided this study

were: (a) What do elementary physical education teachers know about management? and (b) How was that knowledge gained and how did teacher knowledge change over time? Understanding what teachers know and how they know it should provide insights into both pre-service and in-service education.

Methods

Participants and Setting

Twenty elementary physical education teachers, 14 females and 6 males, volunteered to share their personal knowledge base about classroom management. Professional experience of the teachers ranged from 1- 28 years, with an average of 15 years of teaching. All were Caucasian public school teachers and taught in urban, suburban, and rural settings. School demographics varied widely as well, with some schools reporting a majority Caucasian student body, while other schools served primarily African-American and Hispanic students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Members of the research team conducted interviews individually. Twelve teachers were interviewed at their school, which also allowed for some limited researcher observation and interaction with students and other school members. Phone interviews (n=8) were used only when the researchers had prior knowledge of the teacher and the physical education program. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes in length. An interview guide (Patton, 1990) structured the conversations and topics included personal teaching history, perceived effectiveness of various management strategies, and contextual factors. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and returned to the teachers for a member check on the data. A few teachers elaborated on answers or made grammatical corrections to their responses, but no substantive changes were suggested.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparison and analytic induction methods to identify emerging common themes across the respondents (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). A number of steps were taken to insure trustworthiness. First, participants were asked to elaborate on and clarify information during a member check of their interviews. Second,

data triangulation occurred via comparisons of different teachers in varied schools and settings. A thorough negative case search constituted a third trustworthiness step.

Results

Teachers provided key insights into their management pedagogical knowledge base growth and development. In the following sections, the themes of teachers' knowledge origin and influences, evolution, and content are discussed.

Knowledge Origin and Influences

The teachers in this study attributed their pedagogical knowledge development about management to a variety of sources including children and other colleagues. Little credit was given to their teacher education programs, with the exception of their field-based teaching experiences. Several described their first years of teaching and perceived lack of adequate preparation as being, "eaten alive," "thrown to the wolves," and "sinking or swimming". In this relatively experienced pool of teachers, all had survived and willingly shared how they believed their management knowledge was gained.

The two most commonly cited and related sources of knowledge were "trial and error" and "children". Jamie put it this way, "It's trial and error. You just learn by experience and every child is different and every experience is different and I think you learn better tools to make the flow a little easier for both of you." Amy agreed, "It's trial and error method the first couple of years. I had some problems and I would try and fail and if it didn't work out, you tried something else."

These physical educators also revealed that much of their knowledge base was gained from other teachers, most importantly their student teaching supervising teacher and prior teachers. Dawn attributed most of her knowledge base about management to her supervising teacher, "My student teaching had a huge impact. His name was John and he taught me so much, taught me how to deal with kids. It was great. He still calls me and I call him." Other teachers admitted they taught, at least initially, like they were taught as public school students, as Holly described, "I stepped into my first teaching experience teaching like my high school PE teachers taught me. It's probably like parenting in that you remember how

maybe teachers that you had handled things." Being able to interact with other teachers, not just physical educators, continued to assist in their development as Linda remarked:

> If I have trouble with something, I'll go ask our assistant principal, the home-school advisor and the classroom teacher. She knows the kids better than anyone else and might have a little tip that I can tell the child. You really have to work together with your staff.

The teachers agreed that their college programs provided minimal assistance in developing their management knowledge base. Only one teacher claimed that she learned a great deal about how to manage children from her college program. A small number of teachers believed that their college program did not address management at all as Don described, "They didn't teach much of it when I was in college. In fact they didn't teach any of it." Anna and others recalled management theory in classes but found that their college experiences did not match their school setting:

> Somebody should have been more realistic about management, specifically about elementary physical education and the number of children you have in class. How do you adapt your classroom atmosphere to account for 50, 56, 58 kids at a time? You [the researcher] come in tomorrow and you'll see four double classes. It's all management.

Other teachers, while still critical of their undergraduate experience, acknowledged the role of the practicum experiences they were afforded. Bryan said, "You don't learn that [management] until you start doing your student teaching and your practical work so that's why I believe practical work is an essential part of undergraduate starting right at the beginning with pre-student teaching."

Knowledge Evolution

Teachers also discussed the evolutionary process of their pedagogical knowledge related to management. One twenty-year veteran found that learning to manage his class was "A gradual thing. You learn a lot. The people that do their best learn from others or borrow from others, if you are willing to keep changing, learning and evolving." Often such evolutionary knowledge resulted in very different practices from their entry-level

management skills. In addition to new techniques, teachers reported philosophic changes in their management approach, as Janice describes:

> I think when I first started I jumped on kids a little too quick so I was very authoritative when I first started. Now it seems the more I teach the more I'm trying to understand kids and really I guess I take my time with them. I've learned the last few years to take a whole different look at what is really going on in their lives and why they're actually acting the way they are.

Dustin concurred, "I've begun to try to understand the kids a little bit more. I try to get to know the kids better from a personal standpoint. I'm less autocratic and I'm a little more democratic." In general, teachers revealed changing to a more humanistic approach, focusing on the student's feelings and self-esteem as a factor in their behavior (Williams, 1999).

When asked what prompted such changes, some teachers mentioned gaining confidence in themselves, which allowed them to look outward to students in class rather than inward. A majority of the teachers, however, cited changing contextual influences as the prompt for their evolution. As Bryan noted when asked about his management evolution, "I had to change because kids have changed." Teachers cited both out-of-school as well as in-school changes.

Outside of school changes included single parent homes, lack of parental behavioral expectations, and dysfunctional families. Teachers spoke of needing to know their students, including information regarding their lives at home. Joanna advised:

> Be aware of the total picture and not just the kid's misbehavior. What things are they bringing into the classroom from home? I don't think that you learn any of that really until you are in the situation. Poverty, abuse – physical and sexual. I was never taught about how to deal with any of that.

Yet she and the other teachers had to learn to deal with such situations as all teachers, regardless of the school setting, reported similar issues in their children's home life.

Teachers believed that these family issues led to changes in student behavior that the teachers had seen over the years. Teachers reported more aggressive behavior by more students. Janet described her classes, "I'm seeing a lot of aggression. I see more and more every year that just get very upset when things do not go their way. They're screaming and yelling at me or other kids." In addition to more aggression, teachers noted an increase in disrespectful behavior. Anna remarked, "I just think that things have changed so much as far as parents and adults being figures of respect. Generally speaking, so many children that I have nowadays will question your authority more and will talk back."

In-school changes had also influenced teachers' management evolution. Several teachers noted that corporal punishment was a common practice when they began their careers and that as corporal punishment was removed or severely limited in their school districts, teachers were forced to find new techniques to handle student misbehavior. The current litigation environment had teachers reconsidering even "positive" touches. Jane described her apprehension about any physical contact with children:

> You are thinking about that more. I give hugs and high fives, and [pats] on the head. But even with one of my favorite kids I just don't do things that I probably used to do. One day I put my hand on his shoulder and he was joking. He said "I'm going to sue you. You can't touch me." I think he was joking, but I took a step back.

A final and related in-school change to their management knowledge and evolution was the presence of special needs students in regular physical education classes. Although not all teachers reported being affected by integrated classes, the ones that did reported management struggles. Linda described the students most likely to disrupt her class, "I think a lot of it happens because kids are not on their medicine that they need to be. There are some kids with some really deep problems like ADD, bi-polar, emotionally handicapped, real personality problems." The teachers believed that these students were probably better behaved in physical education than elsewhere, but when "having a bad day" could cause real problems. Anna described those "bad days" for her emotionally handicapped students,

"Those kids in class can destroy the whole class. Those are the ones that I'm not sure whatto do with. When they come in here and are just destroying the entire classroom atmosphere."

Knowledge Content

Somewhat surprisingly, even though the teachers claimed a personal and eclectic pedagogical knowledge gained from numerous experiential resources, their knowledge bases were quite similar. First, teachers in all settings described the need for consistency in their interactions with students. Justin remarked, "Kids have to know exactly where you are coming from and after that I need to be fair, firm, and consistent. Kids feel comfortable in your class when they know what to expect." Second, teachers' pedagogical knowledge involved a humanistic approach, which included speaking with children individually, developing mutual respect, modeling desired behaviors, and knowing their students. Peggy believed that "Good behavior should be expected. However, when a child is misbehaving I try to talk to them one on one. I try to remove them from their audience. I don't like to embarrass them so that everyone can hear." Several teachers shared Patricia's sentiment regarding respect:

> Respect has to start with the teacher. Teachers have to render respect to children. You have to model it. If I start yelling and screaming, they are going to do the same thing. Children do not know what respect is until they see it.

A number of teachers addressed the need to not only model the behaviors they desired, but to acknowledge them when demonstrated by students. One teacher noted, "You don't have to point out the negative behaviors, they already know what they are. Try to point out what's positive." Knowing students was also important. Such knowledge related to their experiences at home and school-related events. "Make sure you have contact with every child in your room, every lesson. It does not have to be skill related. Maybe you noticed their name on the wall for something special, like reading. It makes them feel special."

Finally, these teachers had a plethora of strategies for teaching and enforcing their expectations. Most used multiple rewards and consequences (e.g. verbal praise, time out, letters to parents, written assignments, grade reductions) as ways to improve student behavior. Teachers also spoke of the need to have students acknowledge responsibility for their own behaviors. Having students reflect on their actions in time out, whether through written or verbal responses, assisted teachers in helping students become accountable. Several teachers used "responsibility plans," which required children to identify what they did and what they could have done to avoid or correct the problem.

Discussion

The intention of this study was to examine elementary physical education teachers' perspectives on their own pedagogical knowledge concerning classroom management. Regardless of whether one is a novice or a veteran teacher, classroom management continues to maintain the attention of physical educators (Goyette, Dore, & Dion, 2000) and these results provide insights into how some teachers learned about and conducted class management. The findings of this study suggest that learning to manage one's classroom is a developmental process influenced by personal and contextual forces.

Similar to Schemmp's (1993) case study of a high school physical education teacher, these elementary teachers most valued knowledge that came from personal practice. Shulman (1987) has called this process of learning from doing, "wisdom of practice". Teachers believed strongly in their wisdom of practice and the wisdom of other colleague's practice.

Teachers did not, however, give much credence to wisdom from their teacher education programs. It is not clear if the teachers' undergraduate programs truly did not address management techniques or if the teachers were unable to make meaning of such information prior to their professional immersion. As Borko and Putnam (1996) noted, "Prospective teachers may not see the relevance of their pedagogy courses to the process of learning to teach and they many not attend closely to the information or the experiences offered by the courses." (p.681).

The elementary physical educators in this study did value the role of their college field based experiences and were quick to suggest the addition of more practicum opportunities into the undergraduate program. Teacher education programs should consider providing progressive, well-defined observations and opportunities for students to interact with numerous educators (k-college; urban & suburban). Such exchanges would provide multiple management frameworks for new knowledge and reflection. By combining these observations and early teaching experiences with college coursework, teacher educators can help pre-service teachers interpret their new knowledge in light of the programmatic message of the physical education-teacher education program--a message that can otherwise be missed (O' Sullivan, 1996; Pagano & Langley, 2001).

Fernandez-Balboa, Barrett, Solmon, and Silverman (1996) suggest the use of cognitive maps to help prospective teachers define and reflect on their current knowledge base and how new material fits within their current knowledge network. Similarly, Clandinin (2000) claims that teacher education programs must recognize the knowledge teachers have gained from practice and then begin with "what preservice teachers already know rather than what should be taught to them" (p. 29). Similar strategies are clearly needed with in-service education programs as teachers' most valued knowledge from self and other practicing teachers, rather than theory de-contextualized from personal school settings.

Elementary physical educators employed multiple classroom management strategies, a finding that varied from the limited resources high school physical educators believed they could use in their classes (Cothran & Ennis, 1997). On average, the teachers in this study had taught for 15 years, yet consistently spoke of their willingness to change and seek out information to improve their classroom management skills. What is the difference between elementary and high school physical education teachers? Most elementary schools physical educators are isolated from other physical education teachers, unlike their high school colleagues. Might this work to their advantage? Elementary physical educators may feel more flexible in their managerial endeavors due to the fact that pressure to conform to the practices of the physical education peers in their building is absent. Teacher isolation can have negative effects (Stroot, 1996), however, it did not seem to influence these teachers.

Housner (1996) found that in order for teachers to continue to grow professionally, or as one participant stated "not getting stale," they had to "self-mentor" (p. 375). When this occurs, teachers reflect, question their beliefs and practices and when needed, change their strategies. As was revealed in this study, "the old ways were not working."

These findings provide intriguing initial insights into teachers' pedagogical knowledge origins, development, and content. Future research is needed to better clarify the exact content of teachers' knowledge and how those "lessons learned" can be shared better with other teachers. Additional information is also needed in relation to teachers' knowledge bases at different grade levels and in differing contexts. Schempp, Manross, Tan, and Fincher (1998) claimed, "To teach one must know." (p. 342). The key to future research would seem to be, what must teachers know? This study provides some insight into possible answers for that question and with additional work in this field, physical educators can be better prepared with the knowledge needed to maximize the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

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